

## Chapter 4

# The Habsburg and Russian Empires: Some Comparisons and Contrasts

Orest SUBTELNY

### 1. Empires: Some Introductory Generalizations

For much of recorded history, most people have lived in empires. Until the twentieth century, empire was the most prevalent and effective way of uniting a variety of peoples and extensive territories under single rule. It was — until the very recent emergence of regional blocs and global organizations — the only way of establishing and maintaining political order in the face of cultural, ethnic, social heterogeneity. This unity was usually imposed by force. We can, therefore, view empire as the rule or control, direct or indirect, political or economic, of one state, nation or people over similar groups.<sup>1</sup>

A reflection of the unifying and stabilizing role that empires usually played is the fact that they were invariably associated with the concept of peace, law and order: we have, for example, Pax Romana, Pax Mongolica, Pax Ottomanica, Pax Russica ( and, most recently, Pax Sovietica and Pax Americana). By the same token, life outside of empire or without empire often viewed, by those within empire, as anarchistic and barbaric, a primitive struggle of one against all. The merits of empire were captured in the oft-repeated Middle Eastern aphorism: one day of anarchy is worse than forty years of tyranny. Thus, whatever their disadvantages, empires, especially at their

high point, offered stability and security. And this was prized by all peoples at all times.

The life span of empires usually had two distinct if frequently overlapping phases: an initial, relatively brief phase, characterized by military conquest and a subsequent, extended phase, where the main focus was on stability, law and order (system maintenance). In general, creating empires was easier than maintaining them. Military conquests, no matter how impressive, were efforts of short or sporadic duration. While they provided impetus to empire-building, they never guaranteed the durability of an empire. It was the second, maintenance phase that demanded long term, consistent, and multi-dimensional success. An empire's longevity was testimony to the consistent skill of its rulers in the difficult task of keeping a variety of peoples together.

For the survival of empires, it was necessary that an implicit quid-pro-quo relationship between ruler and subjects be established and maintained. In this relationship, what imperial rulers expected from their subjects was clear and explicit: they demanded obedience and taxes. But subjects also had their expectations of the rulers, even though these were rarely explicitly expressed: in return for obedience and taxes, they expected their rulers to provide them with security, law and order. Empires in which this trade-off functioned effectively and consistently could expect a lengthy existence. Those which failed to maintain this quid-pro-quo arrangement invariably had a short life span.

In order to rule effectively, that is, to maintain the above-mentioned trade-off, imperial rulers invariably applied integrative policies. Integration was the only way an empire could fulfill its function of uniting various peoples and vast territories. An emperor could not keep his side of bargain with subjects if he did not, sooner or later, to greater or lesser extent, attempt to draw political and economic components of the empire closer together; to impose standard laws, currency, obligations; to introduce a common language, culture and

ideology. Integration, therefore, consisted of centralization and standardization.

Centralization was the attempt to control and to direct key aspects of politics, economics, and culture in the various, widely scattered parts of the empire from one center, more specifically, from the imperial capital and the imperial court. It was, invariably, a difficult task, involving conflicts between the imperial center, which sought to monopolize power, and the regional or local elites that did everything possible to keep some of it in their hands. To make their task of governing the heterogeneous societies easier, imperial governments, and especially their bureaucracies also attempted to obliterate local, regional cultural differences, that is, to standardize. Thus, these policies pitted imperial systems against deeply-ingrained and fiercely defended aspects of the subject societies. To overcome these particularistic tendencies over long periods of time required a high level of political skill.

In terms of structure, most empires rested on two key institutional pillars: the army and the bureaucracy. The function of the first was to extend borders of the empire when the opportunity arose or to assure internal order when necessary. Bureaucracy's main function was to secure funds for the support of the army. These two institutional pillars of empire were linked by a third, over-arching institution, that of the emperor and his court. Its function was to coordinate and direct the army and bureaucracy and to serve as the incarnation of empire. Such, in bare outline, were the basic features and functions of most empires.

From a global perspective, we may now move to a European one. The Europeans produced two distinct types of empires. One, which fit the universal pattern established by the empires of antiquity, might be called the classic type.<sup>2</sup> It served as the basis for the preceding discussion. And the territorial conglomerates accumulated by the Habsburgs and Romanovs in central and eastern Europe fall into this category. The other type included the more recent,

commercial-capitalist overseas or colonial empires built by the British, French, Spanish and other west European powers.

Among the empires of the first or classical category, geopolitical motives seem to have played the primary role in motivating expansion; among those in the second or colonial category, it is generally accepted that economic considerations provided the key driving force for expansion. This is not to say, however, that the impetus for expansion was simple and clear-cut. In every case of expansion, in every type of empire, a variety of motivating factors were always involved. Nonetheless, the classical/geopolitical and the colonial/commercial dichotomy is useful for purposes of analysis because it aids us in focusing on general tendencies in one type of empire or another. As we will see later, it also helps to situate the Habsburg and Romanov realms in the context of other empires.

At this point, several comments of a historiographical nature are in order.<sup>3</sup> Although empires are as old as history, imperialism is a modern concept. The man commonly credited with introducing it is the Englishman, J. Hobson. In 1902, he wrote a book entitled *Imperialism*, which was a critical analysis of how and why the British became involved in the Boer War. In it Hobson concluded that this episode of British expansionism, as well as many others, was primarily motivated by the need of British capital to find higher returns on capital in the face of shrinking returns at home.

While Hobson's work initiated the study of imperialism, it also skewed it. It identified empire and imperialism, first and foremost, with a) colonial empires like those of Britain and other European industrialized countries b) with the forces of capitalism and c) with modern imperialism of the late 19 and 20th centuries, that is, with the age of capitalism. This approach was enthusiastically adopted and elaborated by Lenin, Hilferding, Luxemburg, Bukharin and, later, by legions of leftist scholars who established, ironically, established a near monopoly on the study of imperialism. Consequently, most work on the topic were often ideologically

biased tracts which attempted to demonstrate, in more or less scholarly terms, the methods, phases and varieties of capitalist exploitation of the Third World. Rarely did these Marxist scholars focus their attention of imperial structure, organization, functioning and maintenance, that is, on the empires as such. Not unexpectedly, they concentrated on imperial failings while ignoring the imperial achievements. In short, the predominant Marxist-based approach to the study of imperialism was more about capitalism than about empires.

Works treating imperialism from a non-economic perspective appeared later and, until recently, were in the minority. A groundbreaking study in this regard was J. Schumpeter's, *Imperialism and Social Change* (1919). Seeking to explain how the great powers of Europe could have embarked on such a self-destructive conflict like World War I, he concluded that answer lay in the realm of the irrational. To prove his point, Schumpeter analyzed the emergence of the ancient empires of Egypt, Assyria, Persia and Rome. And he argued that their expansion was propelled by atavistic tendencies, specifically by the survival of deeply ingrained but no longer essential warrior traditions in the military elites of these societies. In each case, he claimed, imperialistic societies developed war-machines which at a certain point were no longer necessary for self-preservation. In order to justify their existence and in response to deeply ingrained psycho-social tendencies, these military elites then embarked on war. Thus, it was a case of conquest for the sake of conquest. Schumpeter implied that similar motivations were at work in modern imperialism as well. Moreover, he emphasized that capitalism not a driving force in imperialism; on the contrary, it actively discouraged imperialism.

In recent decades, a variety of other non-economic explanations for imperialism have appeared.<sup>4</sup> Most traditionalist is the view that imperialism could best be understood in terms of international (political) competition, that it is competition between states that has been simply extended to a global level. Others prefer to treat imperialism

in terms of modernization. They argue that not only did modernization create great political, economic and military disparity among the people of the world, but it also brought them into greater proximity to each other. The result was an almost natural tendency of the more developed, responding to a power vacuum, to impose dominion over the less developed. German scholars have been especially attracted to social imperialism, that is, the creation of empires as a means to ease social tensions at home. Meanwhile, the Englishman, D. Fieldhouse introduced a useful corrective to the studies of imperialism by pointing out that imperial expansion originates not only in the imperial center but also on the periphery of empire.<sup>6</sup> For example, expansion frequently occurred due to the machinations and initiative of local imperial administrators working with local collaborators. Often acting without the acquiescence of the imperial center, they pushed into new territories when opportunities appeared and for reasons of self-aggrandizement. In other cases, a turbulent frontier, specifically, the need to impose order and maintain security upon it, led empires to expand further than they originally intended. Despite the considerable differences among them, these approaches concur in that profit was not the primary motive for empire-building. And that, essentially, the primary goals of empire have been to exert power and control.

## **2. The Habsburg and Romanov Empires: Some Common Features**

As noted above, the Habsburg and Romanov empires form a distinct category among the European empires.<sup>6</sup> They are the only European empires that are of the classical type. We will, therefore, focus on the features that they shared and that distinguished them from the others European empires.

- (1) Imperial heritage — both Austrian and Russian territorial conglomerates were originally peripheries of other

empires. In the case of Austria, it was the eastern frontier (Osterreich) of the Carolinian and Holy Roman empires. Muscovy formed the western periphery of the Mongol empire. In addition, during the Kievan period and after, Moscow was exposed to the influence of the Byzantine empire. When the empires of which they were a part collapsed, both Habsburg and Muscovite rulers embarked on their own empire-building careers. Unlike England, France or Spain, they did not experience a period as relatively homogeneous, nationally-based kingdoms. The point is that both Austria and Muscovy emerged within empires and then sought to re-create similar conglomerates on their own. They knew no other political form of political organization except empire.

The heritage of empire was evident in the *Weltanschauung* of the two dynasties. They tried to trace their genealogies back to Rome, they laid claims to lands by arguing that they once belonged to empires to which they claimed to be the legitimate successors, they envisaged themselves as universal monarchies, and they steered clear of narrow, ethnic identification. Finally, they saw their mission in classical terms: to attain predominance over numerous peoples and vast territories and, in the process, to bring order and security to these lands.

(2) Continental location — both empires consisted of contiguous land masses, They did not extend their rule overseas like the English, French or Spanish. Because they tended to subjugate their immediate neighbors, cultural differences, or more accurately difference in levels of development were, generally, not as great among Habsburgs or Romanovs and their subjects as they were in the case of the colonial metropolises and their colonies. Indeed, some Moscow's subjects, for example, the Livonians, Ukrainians or Poles, were more highly developed than their rulers. And in the Habsburg case, it is difficult to say which were the more developed lands, Bohemia and Italy or the Austrian heartland.

Because some of the conquered peoples, or at least their elites, possessed highly-developed administrative, military, commercial or cultural skills, they were coopted by Habsburg and Romanovs. Consequently, the ethnic intermixture in the imperial centers was extensive. Vienna teemed with Italians, Hungarians, and Poles. The readiness of Moscow to accept Tatars in its service is well known. Later came Baltic Germans, Ukrainians, and Poles. Under such conditions, the idea of basing their empires on a single nationality had little appeal to the Habsburgs and to the Romanovs. Like the classic empires, they were cosmopolitan in their world view. This stands in sharp contrast to the west European colonial empires, each of which was based on the predominance of a single nationality and in which it was impossible for colonial subjects to attain positions of power at the imperial center.

(3) The turbulent frontier — For both Austria and Russia securing their frontiers was a constant and pressing problem. Indeed, the attempt to secure their frontiers was one of the major reasons for their expansion. For centuries, the Habsburgs had to confront the Ottoman threat. And as they slowly pushed the Ottomans back, the Habsburgs acquired the "liberated" lands of Hungary, Transylvania and Croatia. Only because Vienna gained these east European lands by right of conquest was it able to impose absolute rule upon them.

From the very outset, Moscow had to struggle for its very survival with the nomads of the steppe. And initially its the greatest expenses were the maintenance of defense systems against incursions by the Tatars. It was the need to capture of Tatar base of operation in the Crimea that finally brought Russia to the shores of the Black Sea and involved it in an extended conflict with the Ottoman empire. A similar threat to the frontier led to Russian expansion into parts of Siberia, Central Asia and the Caucasus where the Kirghiz and Kalmuks nomads and Caucasian tribesmen posed a constant threat. Thus, for both Austria and Russia, imperial expansion

was, to a large extent, a function of establishing secure borders.

The importance of frontier warfare for both empires is reflected in the fact that both empires there evolved social groups specializing in border defense. In Russia the well-known Cossacks fulfilled this function.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile in the Habsburg lands, especially in the Adriatic region, this role was performed by the *Grenzers*. But defending the borders was not only the function of these irregular troops. Both Muscovite and Habsburg regular forces were used in border defense. In fact, the process of organizing border defense played a formative role in the creation of the Romanov and especially the Habsburg regular armies.

The turbulent frontier was a crucial and common experience for both the Habsburg and Russian empires. While their imperial heritage might have pushed both Habsburgs and Romanovs to think in terms of universal rule, instability on their frontier pulled them into expansion. It was, therefore, a case of push-pull effects at work in the building of empire. Finally, it was traditional empire building in the sense that involved the classic trade-off: in return for their obedience, the new subjects of the Habsburgs and Romanovs received security.

(4) Defenders of Christianity — By pushing back the Tatars and Ottomans, both empires also prevented Islam from establishing a foothold in eastern Europe and the Balkans. In fact, in both both cases the defense of Christianity was a major theme in their growth. The Habsburgs especially emphasized their role as the *antemurale* of Christianity and did their best to strengthen Catholicism in newly acquired lands. Moscow also stressed its role as defender of Orthodoxy. For example, it repeatedly used the argument that Orthodox Ukrainians should accept Moscow's sovereignty because the tsar was their best defense against the Catholic Poles and Muslim infidels. Consequently, churchmen in Ukraine soon became the most enthusiastic proponents of Russian overlordship in their land.

For centuries, Russia's attempts to expand its influence in the Balkans was associated with its claims that it was defending Orthodoxy in that region.

Religion and empire-building have often been closely related. But there was a crucial difference in the Austrian and Russian approach to religion when compared to that of the west European colonial empires. The latter functioned as propagators of Christianity, supporting missionaries who attempted to convert the colonial peoples. The two east European empire, however, were defenders of Christianity. Missionary activity was not an important feature of their expansion. And Russia, for the most part, showed considerable tolerance in the treatment of its Muslim subjects. Finally, both empires became bulwarks of Christianity in large parts of southeastern and eastern Europe. Indeed, Russian extended Christianity to the shores of the Pacific.

(5) Struggle with democracy and nationalism — While the two empires served as patrons of religious Europeanization of the eastern part of the continent, they had an ambivalent attitude about introducing political Europeanization into their domains. In this connection, it should be emphasized that none of the major ideas, values, institutions commonly associated with European political culture were developed in the east, in the realms of the Habsburgs and Romanovs. Their historical role, especially after the French Revolution, was to stifle or to impede the spread of western political concepts and ideologies eastward. But, of course, rejection of the West was not total. Techniques and technologies that were useful to two empires, in an instrumental sense, were eagerly accepted and implemented. Even absolutism as a concept was adopted (since it fitted in so well with ancient concepts of imperial rule).<sup>8</sup> For the most part, however, western conceptual innovations, especially those that were political-ideological in nature, were treated with suspicion if not outright enmity by the imperial governments. In this sense, both empires were similar to rest of the non-Western world in their confrontation

with Westernization: they were willing to accept western techniques but not western concepts, (esp. political) Thus, on the one hand, they helped to westernize the eastern part of the continent. But on the other hand, they contributed greatly to the creation of the crucial differences between its eastern and western parts.

Crucial in this regard was their struggle against the two western ideologies: democracy and nationalism. Throughout the 19th century and until their collapse, the two empires attempts to contain the social and political impact of these ideologies was the central feature of their history. Indeed, they were the first empires to confront — and to succumb — to movements awakened by these political-ideological forces. This is yet another way in which the two empires were similar to each other and different from other European states: for them democracy and nationalism were mortal threats while for the west European nation-states (if not their colonial empires) they were a sources of strength.

It took a revolution in 1848 to force Vienna to accept constitutionalism and universal civil rights. In Russia this occurred in, in part, in 1905. And as the power of the imperial centers weakened, the component parts of the empire, fueled by nationalism, began to pull apart. Decentralization, a process that contradicts the very nature of empire — was well underway in the Habsburg realms before World War I. In Russia there was only talk of a possible federalization of the empire. But the rapidity with which the Russian empire disintegrated in 1917 indicates that the forces of nationalism and decentralization would have swept through that empire as well. It was the fate of the Habsburg and Romanov empires to be the first to prove that, in the face of democratization and nationalism, empires were no longer viable. The world would have to find another way of bring about the peaceful coexistence of its variegated peoples.

(6) Initiators of modernization — in the eastern part of Europe there is a deeply-ingrained tradition of initiating and

introducing change and modernization from above. While there is a variety of reasons for this tendency, certainly both empires, by the very nature of their centralized decision-making process, did much to maintain it. The most recent proponent of rapid modernization in the region — the USSR — also introduced it from above. Interestingly enough, the Soviet Union's border coincided closely with those of both the Romanov and Habsburg empires.

### **3. The Habsburg and Romanov Empire: Some Differences**

(1) The political/ideological context — For a large part of their collective career, the Habsburgs were imperial rulers more in theory than in practice. For almost five centuries they presided over the Holy Roman Empire which, as Voltaire quipped, was neither Holy, nor Roman, nor an empire. It was, rather, a loose federation of largely Germanic principalities which paid lip-service to the ideal of a Christian empire, regularly elected the Habsburgs to preside over it, but insisted on doing what suited their interests. The basic political values and institutions which prevailed in the Holy Roman Empire were those of feudalism. And it was in confrontation with these principles that the Habsburgs attempted to establish a centralized controlled universal state. Even though the Habsburgs frequently came into conflict with these feudal ways, they were intimately familiar with them and willing to coexist with them. Thus the context from which the Habsburgs emerged was Germanic /Catholic/ feudal.

Only in the 18th century, when the 1000-year old Holy Roman Empire was on last legs, did the Habsburgs focus attention on east Europe and proceed to develop there the classic forms of an centralized, integrated, uniform imperial state. But even then, their aspirations were repeatedly challenged, most notably by the Hungarians. Thus, Habsburg imperial rule, despite its illustrious pedigree, was never

completely accepted by its subjects and frequently found itself on the defensive.

The Russian empire emerged from a Slavic /Orthodox/ Byzantine/Mongol environment.<sup>9</sup> It was, obviously, much further removed from European institutions and values than the domains of the Habsburgs. But although its imperial heritage was not as illustrious as that of Austria (Moscow's ruler tried to claim that their genealogy reached back to Rome but Vienna scoffed at this), its imperial rule was much more extensive and real. Moscow did not have to deal with the limitations which political feudalism imposed on the Habsburgs. The patrimonial principles which it espoused — and which its subjects generally accepted — fitted in well with an emperor's traditional claims to absolute power. Moreover, from the outset the Orthodox Church supported Moscow's imperial claims. Its creation of the so-called Third Rome theory is only one example. For contrast, one need only recall the long and decisive conflict between the popes of Rome and the Holy Roman emperors which unsettled central Europe. True, later the Catholic church did support the Habsburgs, and visa-versa. But this was only after an emperor's claim to supreme authority was shattered in Europe in general, and in particular in the lands where the Habsburgs emerged. In short, the theoretical basis for Habsburgs claims to predominance were weaker than those of the Russian rulers.

(2) The physical and social environment — There were vast differences as to the types of areas into which the two empires expanded. The Habsburgs operated in a relatively developed setting. Many of their lands were in the heart of Europe and even those in eastern Europe were not a "different world." Their subjects were almost all Christians. When compared to the Russian empire, Habsburg territories were not vast because the Habsburgs were always surrounded by powerful neighbors.

Russia, in contrast, had almost unlimited room for expansion, especially in the East and southeast where a power

vacuum existed. Covering 1/6 of the world's land mass, it encompassed a tremendous variety of peoples and cultures. It encompassed peoples who had barely emerged from Stone Age cultures and the highly sophisticated Baltic Germans or Polish aristocrats. What is striking about the Russian empire is that it included many peoples who were culturally more advanced than the Russians while in the Habsburg lands, German-speaking people were considered to be the most culturally advanced. In geopolitical terms, Russia had a much more advantageous position than the Habsburg empire. When it met resistance to expansion in the west, it could always focus its attention on aggrandizements in the East and visa-versa. Unlike the Habsburg domains, the Russian empire was both a European and an Asian power (and, briefly, an American one as well).

(3) Methods of expansion — As is well known, the Habsburg acquired many of their lands not by conquest but by judicious marriages ("Let others go to war, you, fortunate Austria, marry") or political arrangements. Only in Hungary and the Balkans was war a means of gaining territory. Because the Habsburgs often could not apply the law of conquest but had to respect the rights and privileges of the lands they acquired by negotiation, they often encountered major obstacles in their attempts to exert complete control. In the Russian case, conquest was the primary means of expansion. And in cases where Russia negotiated the acquisition of new lands such as in Ukraine, Livonia, Georgia sooner or later it felt that it could ignore the commitments it made to respect local "rights and privileges." Therefore, the tsars had fewer problems in claiming unlimited authority.

(4) Rationales for expansion — The Habsburgs generally used four types of arguments to justify their claims for territory and authority, especially in eastern Europe. One was based on legality, that is, they claimed that lands belonged to them as part of a matrimonial agreement. The second type of

argument was a moral one and it emphasized their role as defenders of Christianity against the Ottoman onslaught (Hungary) or of Catholicism against Protestantism (Bohemia). Political pragmatism characterized the third type of argument, namely that lands freed from Turks were Vienna's by right of conquest (Hungary). And the fourth type of argument rested on Habsburg promises to provide more effective and just government than that which previously existed in a given land (Poland).

Initially, the tsars also utilized the inheritance argument, although it rested on flimsier, less legally-binding grounds than that of the Habsburgs. Moscow claimed that by "gathering the Rus lands" it was reclaiming its patrimony. However, the rulers of Lithuania could and did challenge this right to the Kievan inheritance. By the same token, in the East, Moscow's rulers, referred to themselves in terms of Chingisid titlature — white tsars — and claimed their right to "gather" the Chingisid inheritance. But here too they could be challenged by the various khans of nomadic hordes who were the direct descendents of Chinghis Khan.<sup>10</sup>

Much more characteristic of Russian claims to hegemony were arguments of a messianic nature. Even inheritance claims had strong element of mission, of moral duty to restore what had existed before. However, the intermingling of hegemonic tendencies and moral obligation was most striking in the so-called "Third Rome theory" which emerged in 1400s and argued that Muscovy, as the bastion of Orthodox holiness, was the true and final successor to the Roman and Byzantine empires. The defense of Orthodoxy was also used to legitimize Moscow's expansion into Ukraine and Balkans in the 17th and 18th centuries. In the 19th century, the mixture of hegemony and messianism took on racial overtones when Russia emerged as defender of Slavs and proclaimed its mission to unite them all under its leadership. It has often been argued that Moscow's attempt to defend the interests of the proletariat around the globe was, at least in part, a reflection of this combination of messianic and hegemonic tendencies.

Indeed, Russia's insistence on acting as the exclusive peacekeeper in the CIS today might be seen as a reflection of these well-established traditions. To summarize: Habsburg arguments for hegemony were more rationalistic while Russia's tended to be more messianistic.

(5) System maintenance — Given the legal, traditional and practical limits on their authority, the Habsburgs were often forced to compromise with their subjects. The most famous case is the agreement reached with the Hungarians in 1867 which created Austria-Hungary. Less well-known but equally characteristic was the agreement which gave the Poles control of Galicia in return for their support of Vienna. And just before World War I, another compromise between Vienna and the Czechs was in the making. This willingness (or necessity) to compromise meant that Habsburg rule was generally regarded as not being overly oppressive. For example, in the emotion-laded field of cultural policy, Germanization, a typical imperial policy, was pursued for the practical purpose of easing communication between the empire's various peoples and the imperial government. The Habsburgs had little hope or desire to turn their subjects into Germans (or Austrians).

Although there existed a clear-cut gradation among the approximately dozen nationalities of the Habsburg empire in terms of influence, privileges and prestige, no one nation predominated, especially after 1867. In fact, the Habsburg demonstrated considerable ability in accommodating the demands of their ever-restive peoples. In the process, they were gradually transforming their empire into a federation. But even though, in functional terms, their empire was becoming a fiction, the Habsburg sought to retain their predominance by providing a context in which the various east European nations could coexist. For this reason even such critics of the empire as the Czech leader, Palacky, acknowledged that if the Habsburg empire collapsed it would be necessary to restore it.

The rulers of Russia, in contrast, were extremely loath to compromise on their autocratic prerogatives. Autocracy was deeply ingrained in Russia, political feudalism never developed there. Therefore, not the art of compromise, but the tactics of the carrot-and-the-stick were usually utilized to keep the empire together. When new lands were acquired, the local elites were usually lulled into subservience by generous socio-economic privileges (but not political ones). But if they resisted, retribution was severe and uncompromising. Because the tsars saw themselves as the sole centers of power, they could not envisage their empire as anything but a unitary state. Consequently, they were adamant in not allowing locally-, territorially-, regionally-based seats of power to exist or develop. The tsar, not one's patria, had to be source of loyalty. Therefore the tsarist imperial government insisted on, and often succeeded, in weakening the ties of local elites with their homelands, something that the Habsburgs could never do.

Unlike the Habsburgs and their policies of Germanization, when the Russian imperial government introduced Russification in the latter part of the 19th century, it actually believed that non-Russian could be turned into Russians. The fact that Russians constituted about 50% of the Russia empire while German-speakers were only 24% of the Habsburg empire account in part for these differing perceptions. In fact the identification of the empire with Russia (*Rossiiid*), a kind of supra-ethnic, Russian-speaking identity, reflected the imperial rulers suspicion of ethnically-based differentiation, their insistence on unitarianism which was incorporated in the slogan — one and indivisible Russia. The belief that the tsar, as the personification of *Rossia*, that is, the empire, could be the only source of political loyalty also explains why the Russian imperial government was so fierce in its persecution of all political dissenters. Its severity in dealing with revolutionaries is well known. But perhaps even more uncompromising was its treatment of certain nationalities, especially the Ukrainians and Belorussians (until 1905 their

language was banned from schools and they were forbidden to publish in it). For example, the government considered the Ukrainians to be a variant of Russians and would not allow further discussion of the issue. Characteristically, in 1863, P. Valuev, minister of the interior declared that "the Ukrainian language never existed, does not exist, and will never exist in the future." In short, when confronted with nationalism, the Habsburgs tried to come to terms with it. But the Russian imperial government attempted to suppress it.

(6) Response to challenges of modernity — There is an inherent contraction between empire and modernity, especially in political and ideological terms. Democracy, civil rights, national sovereignty are obviously incompatible with unlimited rule of emperors. Therefore, that imperial rule would be sorely tested in the modern period was unavoidable. The essential question was how imperial rulers would respond to these challenges.

It appears that the Habsburg empire was more successful in adapting to modernity. It was closer to the West, the source of modernization. Modern ideas and techniques seeped in more gradually and evenly. And there was a longer period of adjustment. Already in the 1780s, Joseph II introduced educational reforms, in 1848 there was a constitution, from 1867 onward there was a growing tendency toward the decentralization of the empire. Nonetheless, it was generally acknowledged that many aspects of modernization — the railroads, industrial developments, education, medical care, defense — could best be attained with aid of empire. Even many members of the Austro-Hungarian socialist and nationalist intelligentsia, desired the continued existence of the empire. They believed that, in the context of Austria-Hungary, they could — the short term — attain many of their goals. Their relatively benign attitude toward the empire was based on the premise that the empire would continue to change, to respond to social and national pressures.

Nationalism, of course, was the central problem. However, the crucial point about nationalism in Austria-Hungary was that it was not primarily directed against Vienna. More often than not, the nations of the empire were in conflict with each other. And Vienna's role as an arbiter in these struggles was generally accepted, especially by weaker peoples like the Ukrainians or Slovaks, in their confrontations with the more influential Poles or Hungarians. Before World War I, the Habsburg empire stood a good chance adjusting to modernity by transforming itself, much like the British did later, from an empire to a commonwealth. It would, of course, no longer be an empire but its demise could have gradual and graceful.

Modernization in the Russian empire was more rapid, extreme and contradictory. An example of the rapidity of the process is the fact that in about one decade, the 1890s, Russia achieved a level of industrialization that was comparable to that which took Europe almost a century to attain. The extremes were even more striking: the most unbending autocracy confronted the most radical revolutionary movement in Europe; excellent universities existed side-by-side with extensive illiteracy; huge, modern factories functioned amidst of a sea of primitive villages; a brilliant, activist intelligentsia was surrounded by vast, apathetic masses. Modernization also created a much more contradictory situation in Russia than it did in Austria-Hungary. While society modernized, the political system remained militantly traditionalist. The more nationalism grew among its various people, the more the establishment insisted on "one, indivisible Russia." As Russia exploited such newly acquired regions as Central Asia, its most developed regions were exploited by European capitalists. Under such conditions, a significant portion of the intelligentsia believed that their only option was to bring down the system by force.

If nationalist conflicts were the greatest threat to the Habsburgs, social upheaval posed the greatest danger to the Romanovs. An interesting question is why socialism, not nationalism, became the focal point of opposition in Russia. A

simple answer is that the Russian intelligentsia was in the majority and it defined opposition in social terms. But why did so many non-Russians choose to fight tsarism as members of Russian organizations rather than their own? Here we have a major achievement of the Russian intelligentsia. It convinced itself and many non-Russian intellectuals as well that the non-pluralistic, Unitarian approach to opposing the autocracy, one based on socialist (not nationalist) agitation, was the one and only way to confront autocracy. Thus, the Russian revolutionaries, like their imperial opponents, demonstrated little willingness to compromise with diversity. They, too, insisted on all-encompassing, centrally-directed solutions to heterogeneity, be it nationally-based or otherwise. It is not surprising, therefore, that they eventually created a new, Soviet empire. Thus, unlike the Habsburg empire, the Russian empire appeared to be capable of reincarnation.

## Notes

- 1 This definition is taken from W. Langer, *The Diplomacy of Imperialism*.
- 2 For the concept of empire in medieval, as especially of the continuity of the Roman imperial idea in the West, see R. Folz, *The Concept of Empire in Western Europe* (1969)
- 3 For a discussion of historiographical and theoretical aspects of the study of imperialism see W. Mommsen, *Theories of Imperialism*.
- 4 These are surveyed and systematized in M. Doyle, *Empires* (1986).
- 5 See D. Fieldhouse, *The Colonial Empires* (1965).
- 6 By the Habsburg empire we mean the lands dominated by the Vienna-based branch of the family, especially after 1648.
- 7 The literature on the Cossacks is vast. For a relatively recent overview see L. Gordon, *Cossack Rebellions* (1983). However, most insightful is still G. Stockl, *Das Entstehens des Kozakentums* (1963). Literature on the Grenziers is summarized in G. Rothenburg, *The Austrian Military Frontier*.
- 8 For a discussion of absolutism in eastern Europe see O. Subtelny, *Domination of Eastern Europe* (1986)
- 9 A recent and excellent study of the Russian empire is A. Kappeler, *Russ-land als Vielvolkerreich* (1992). This groundbreaking work is the first modern study of Russia as a multinational empire.
- 10 Ibid, pp. 29-50.